

## Downtown Commission Annual Report – 2010

*"...the public welfare and interest of the citizens of the city will best be served by establishing and maintaining a commission for the sustainability and continued development of downtown, a vital urban center of western North Carolina's economic, cultural and visitor activity."*

-From the creation ordinance of the Downtown Commission (July 22, 1982)

### Overview of 2010

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2010 was very different from years past for the Downtown Commission. With the economic downturn came an end to monthly agendas filled with large-scale development review. Additionally, the Downtown Master Plan was adopted by City Council in the previous year which meant another new direction as the Commission had to determine how to make sure the Plan did not just "gather dust." And with many long-term Commissioners reaching the end of their terms, the membership of the board saw a shift from primarily architects and designers to welcome more local business owners, bringing a unique perspective to the table and a change to the conversation.

The pause provided to the Commission by the nation's economic recession was anything but quiet. This year was a time to check in on how things are operating in the downtown, making it better on a day to day basis for businesses, visitors and residents.

### Areas of Focus in 2010

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#### *Downtown Master Plan*

City Council adopted the Downtown Master Plan in 2009, so in 2010 the focus shifted from adoption to implementation. Five subcommittees were established to carry out the goals of the Plan, with Commissioners serving on each body and reporting back to the full Commission each month:

- *Downtown Management:* The Commission voted to endorse the undertaking of an economic benefits study (September), supported the RFP for information to be supplied to downtown property owners regarding the benefits of a Community Investment District and voted that the City should contribute \$3,500 (November)
- *Transportation and Parking:* The Commission voted to support installing temporary signage on bike lockers by Rankin Garage until there can be a more creative, artistic solution (October)
- *Arts and Culture:* The Commission received regular updates on the outreach and efforts of this group, including the concept of establishing a citywide arts commission in the future
- *Urban Design:* The Commission carefully reviewed and voted to support the UDO ordinance changes and recommendations of the subcommittee (more below)
- *Historic Preservation:* The Commission voted to partner with the Historic Resources Commission for sponsorship of Preservation Month activities held in May

### *UDO Changes*

The Urban Design Subcommittee was made up of multiple members of the Commission as well as volunteers from the community. Over the course of more than 20 meetings, the DTMP recommendations in Strategies 4 & 5 were reviewed, keeping some as written and revising others to better meet with the goals and needs of the CBD.

- DTC voted to recommend approval of the UDO changes (June); the Planning & Zoning Commission recommended approval (September) and City Council adopted the changes on November 23<sup>rd</sup> – signaling the first major implementation of the Downtown Master Plan
- The group will continue to meet in the coming year to finalize Downtown Design Guidelines and work on the list of new and unresolved concepts from the Plan that did not fit into the scope of the UDO

### *Park Permitting and Street Closures for Special Events*

With the completion and opening of Pack Square Park, it became evident that the new layout needed a new policy to avoid conflicts between special events and existing businesses and residents.

- Working closely with the Building Safety Permitting Office and over multiple special meetings with stakeholders from the community, a new policy was developed for street closures for special events in Pack Square Park (August) as well as a policy for the rest of the CBD (November).
- After a year of operating under these new City policies, the Commission will re-evaluate to see if conflicts have been successfully avoided or if any additional tweaks are needed to have a healthy, vibrant downtown.

### *Handicapped Parking in the Central Business District*

This issue was brought to the attention of the Commission – that on-street metered parking spaces were being occupied for long periods of time by users displaying a handicapped tag (which goes against the purpose of high-turnover on-street parking spaces in a business district).

- Working with the City Attorney, a new policy was developed requiring all users of metered on-street parking spaces to pay for their time, regardless of disability (July & October)

## **Design Review in 2010**

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Although there was considerably less design review work for the Commission in 2010, two substantial proposals were evaluated that once completed will certainly change the look of downtown.

### *Asheville Art Museum Renovation*

- Level II review for a landmark building design unanimously approved in February 2010 (7-0)

#### *County Courthouse Life Safety Addition*

- Level III – CUP review for a new life safety tower with the demolition of 189 College Street, Courthouse Annex Building – design unanimously approved 8-0 in March 2010 but with separate vote urging demolition of Annex Building to be delayed until absolutely necessary

#### *Downtown Inn*

- Recommendations made to the Board of Adjustment and Tree Commission in July 2010 for variance requests on setback and landscaping on a Level I proposal unanimously endorsed

### **Subcommittee Work in 2010**

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Subcommittees have always been an essential part of the Commission, allowing for focused attention on key issues outside of formal meetings. Subcommittee members provide monthly updates on their discussions to the full Commission, many of which become recommendations, resolutions and changes to City policy, procedures and ordinances.

#### *Design Review Subcommittee*

- This long standing committee started the year as a combined body with the DTMP Design Review Subcommittee, working towards the UDO changes. Later in the year, the focus shifted to design guidelines – a supplement to the ordinance where the more subjective design interpretations are found. This document is adopted by the Commission itself and does not require approval by City Council. The group is also working on streetscape issues, including discussing several bench removal requests and supported a Department of Public Works policy on granite curbing replacement in the CBD (December).

#### *Mobile Food Vending Subcommittee*

- Towards the end of the year, this committee was established to work closely with the Asheville Independent Restaurants group and interested potential mobile food vendors to evaluate the current procedures and issues surrounding mobile food vending in the Central Business District. This has become a popular topic nationally and recommendations to revise the UDO may be initiated in the coming year. The subcommittee was established in 2010 but will begin meeting in 2011.

**DOWNTOWN COMMISSION  
ROSTER OF MEMBERSHIP  
UPDATED 01/2011**

Members (unless ex-officio appointments) are eligible for 2 full terms; those appointed to fill partial/unexpired terms are eligible for 2 full plus the partial term

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**CHAIR  
BUNCOMBE COUNTY APPOINTEE  
DWIGHT BUTNER 254-4698**

10 N. Market Street  
Asheville NC 28801  
Email: [vinpiano@aol.com](mailto:vinpiano@aol.com)  
Appointed March 18, 2008  
Partial term expired 12/31/2009  
Reappointed on: 12/01/2009  
New term expires: 12/31/2012

**VICE CHAIR  
KITTY LOVE 216-8815**  
77 Montana Avenue  
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Email: [kitty@arts2people.org](mailto:kitty@arts2people.org)  
First term expired: 12/31/2008  
Eligible to serve until: 12/31/2011

**EX-OFFICIO CITY COUNCIL  
JAN DAVIS 251-5634**  
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Serves while a member of City Council

**EX-OFFICIO  
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Serves while Downtown Association President

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Appointed to fill partial term  
First term expired: 12/31/2009  
Eligible to serve until: 12/31/2012

**BUNCOMBE COUNTY APPOINTEE/  
PACK SQUARE CONSERVANCY LIAISON  
PAM MYERS 253-3227**

Asheville Art Museum  
2 S. Pack Square  
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First term expired: 04/01/11  
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Eligible to serve until: 12/31/2015

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Appointed to fill partial term until: 12/31/2011  
Eligible for two more terms until: 12/31/2017

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Appointed to fill partial term until: 12/31/2011  
Eligible for two more terms until: 12/31/2017

**STAFF/ADMINISTRATION**  
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